

Acts of Kindness

How Michigan's Direct Care Workers have brought love and trust back to Mary Wheeler's life

Developmental and medical issues. Abuse. Neglect. All these issues are in the rear-view mirror, thanks to the dedicated service of some of our state's finest caregiving professionals.

Mary's story is a difficult one.

After a childhood marked by many hurts—some made deliberately by unkind, malicious people she had wanted to trust—she was sent to an institution in Mt. Pleasant. For a decade and a half, she met with more of the same.

Then in 1980, Mary moved to a small, caring six-bed group home. She waited there until the day she could finally cross the threshold of her very own home.

But even in her forever place, Mary found it hard to trust that people had good motives and that they would keep her safe, let alone help her thrive.

Over time, however, the Direct Care Workers who came to support Mary began to earn her trust. They listened to Mary and helped her begin to communicate and engage in the community.

They also have worked hard to address her medical issues, which include diabetes and, most recently, a diagnosis of cancer. Her team makes sure to give her the medications she needs, including insulin. They watch for signs of skin breakdown and know exactly what to do if they see it happening. And, most of all, they provide her with loving social/emotional support during her cancer treatments and have been her lifeline during these COVID lock downs.

Mary is lucky in that she has a few staff who have been with her for many years, in spite of the fact that the wages they earn do not pay the bills. For her, to have that consistency is literally lifesaving. She would love nothing more than for her staff to get paid enough to only have one job—working with her.

